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UNION REPRESSION IN TURKEY

Comment. The Turkish labor movement has been developing rapidly for the past several years. Recently, there have been charges of attempted repression of unions, much of it attributed directly to government officials. This is noteworthy since the present government achieved power in May 1950 partly as the result of labor support arising from its pledge to enact a law permitting strikes, a promise which has still not been fulfilled.

The following report is based on Turkish newspapers for the period 16 September 1952 - 24 January 1953. Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.

On 17 December, Ulus reported that a labor dispute had arisen in Ayancik between the Sinop State Forest Exploitation and the Ayancik Madeni Isler ve Agac Sanayi Iscleri Sandikasi (Ayancik Metalworks and Wood Industry Workers Syndicate), with the syndicate charging that the management was deliberately trying to break up the syndicate and to discharge its members. The syndicate further charges, continued the paper, that with the encouragement of the local DP (Democrat Party) organization, the company established a second syndicate, which it placed under the orders of the DP.

According to the paper, members of the syndicate's administrative committee, fearing that their syndicate was about to be destroyed, contacted Turk-Is (Confederation of Turkish Workers Syndicates) and sent a delegation to Ankara to protest to the government. The newspaper then printed a statement, a summary of which follows, made to one of its reporters by Insun Erdem, the syndicate president:

We hope that our complaint to the Labor Ministry will produce results. The director of the exploitation told us that "to create labor disputes is a Communist tactic. They want to create confusion here. We have received orders from above to destroy this syndicate, which we have been overly slow in doing. Those who do not resign [from the syndicate] will definitely be

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fired " The company has fired Paik Yavuz, our vice-president, and Ali Aydin, the chairman of our disciplinary court, on grounds of economy, as well as other workers who were believed to have secretly rejoined the syndicate after being coerced to resign. In the last 2½ months, 200 syndicate members have resigned, while two administrative committee members and 60 syndicate members have been fired since our delegation came to Ankara; yet during the last 3 months, the Ayancik mill has hired 150 new workers. Workers have related the situation to the labor inspector sent to Ayancik by the ministry and have submitted sworn affidavits, but nevertheless the pressure has increased and workers are still being fired. If the Labor and Agriculture Ministries do not settle the matter satisfactorily, we shall take our case to the Grand National Assembly. (1)

On 20 December, Ulus reported that the syndicate delegation, accompanied by Ismail Inan, president of Turk-Is, had visited the two involved ministries the previous day. According to the paper, they found Ibrahim Sargut, Undersecretary of Agriculture, completely passive and motivated by a bureaucratic attitude. He told them that the matter was of no importance, although it would be studied, while Muris Fer, Undersecretary of Labor, exhibited an interest in the problem and promised that the documents submitted by the delegation would be carefully studied and that necessary instructions would be sent to the regional labor inspectorate.

Ulus quoted Inan as saying that the action against the Ayancik workers was very serious and unparalleled in the history of the Turkish labor movement and that he was sure that the representations to the administrative authorities would produce positive results. According to the paper, Inan also declared that the behavior of the labor inspector involved was of a nature to require legal proceedings against him and that Turk-Is would investigate every legal channel. (2)

A previous attempt at union repression was reported by Gace Postasi on 16 September. According to the paper, the Istanbul Cimento Sanayii Iscileri Sendikasi (Istanbul Cement Industry Workers Syndicate), of which Ibrahim Balci is president, had sent a letter to President Bayar, charging that the Zeytinburnu Cement Plant was unjustly discharging workers on economy grounds, even though it has an annual profit of 1,500,000 lira. The paper stated that the syndicate termed the action a lockout /which is prohibited by law/ and charged also that the plant was hiring new workers at lower wages to replace those fired. The letter asked Bayar to take necessary action, concluded the news paper. (3)

Ulus on 18 December reported that the Bursa Sendikaları Birliği (Union of Bursa Syndicates) had filed a complaint with Turk-Is, charging that members of syndicates belonging to the union were being subjected to every sort of pressure aimed at forcing them to resign from the syndicates. The complaint also charged, continued Ulus, that labor inspectors were biased in favor of employers and that the only solution would be for syndicate observers to accompany the inspectors in their investigations. According to the paper, the Turk-Is executive committee, in view of the increasing number of such complaints, has decided to contact proper authorities and demand that employers be forced to respect the Labor Law and Law No 5015, which authorizes the establishment of syndicates and gives workers the right to join them. (4)

On 21 January, Vatan published a statement issued by Turk-Is, which declared that "throughout Turkey, pressures against syndicates and their members are continuing in government offices and in official and private establishments, with the result that many workers are being fired. Despite the many complaints made to regional labor directorates and the Labor Ministry about such activities in state economic organizations, nothing is being done, and the complaints are not even being acknowledged." The statement touched on the

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Ayancik problem and said that the confederation's efforts to achieve a satisfactory solution had proven futile and quoted the Agriculture Minister as having said, "Why is the Labor Ministry meddling in my affairs?" According to Vatan, the statement also cited numerous complaints from Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Bursa, Tuncbilek, Gaziantep, Nazilli, and Zonguldak and pledged that Turk-Is, despite the indifference of officials and of those ignoring the law, would continue its efforts to stop such activities.(5)

On 24 January, Vatan reported that Turk-Is had issued a press bulletin about union repression, which cited the statements at a meeting of the Degirmensaz Komur Madeni Iscleri Sendikası (Degirmensaz Coal Mine Workers Syndicate) of the governor of Kutahya and of the Kutahya public prosecutor. According to Vatan, the bulletin claimed that the public prosecutor had told the meeting that he considered the workers' demands to be Communistic and threatened syndicate members with prosecution under Article 142 of the Penal Code; the governor was alleged to have told newsmen that it was necessary to abolish syndicates. Turk-Is is asking the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior to take action against the two men, Vatan concluded.(6)

SOURCES

1. Ankara, Ulus, 17 Dec 52
2. Ibid., 20 Dec 52
3. Istanbul, Gece Postası, 16 Sep 52
4. Ulus, 18 Dec 52
5. Istanbul, Vatan, 21 Jan 53
6. Ibid., 24 Jan 53

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